

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF MISSISSIPPI
NORTHERN DIVISION

SHAWN MACKEY

PLAINTIFF

V.

CIVIL ACTION NO. 3:23-CV-233-DPJ-ASH

JOHN PIGOTT, ET AL.

DEFENDANTS

ORAL DEPOSITION OF JOHN PETER MCRIGHT

VOLUME I

Taken at the instance of the Plaintiff on Tuesday,
September 17, 2024, in the Office of the Mississippi
Attorney General, 550 High Street,
13th Floor, Jackson, Mississippi,
beginning at 3:31 p.m.

(Appearances noted herein)

REPORTED BY: Kelly D. Brentz, CSR-MS, CSR-TX, RPR
AW Reporting, LLC
338 Indian Gate Circle
Ridgeland, Mississippi 39157
kelly@awreporting.com
601-573-0961

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. He had been -- I do know that he had been at
3 Mississippi State as their president and he had served
4 Alabama -- University of Alabama for a long time. I knew
5 who he was but that's really all I knew.

6 Q. Do you recall whether you ever participated in a
7 formal vote for Andrea to be the -- Andrea Mayfield to be
8 the executive director?

9 A. Yes, ma'am.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. I was there for that vote.

12 Q. Okay. And did you vote in favor of her?

13 A. I did.

14 Q. And who were the other finalists for the job?

15 A. I know Dr. Mackey was. I don't remember. I
16 don't recall. There was -- I don't remember if there
17 were -- I think there was one more, maybe two, but I'm
18 thinking it was one more. I just don't remember.

19 Q. Did you view Angela (sic) Mayfield as a problem
20 for the MCCB?

21 A. At the time?

22 Q. At any point during her tenure as executive
23 director?

24 A. Yes, ma'am.

25 Q. And tell me why you viewed her as a problem.

1 A. Well, it really goes -- it really goes back to
2 some legislation that was passed to create what we thought
3 was going to be a workforce czar. That term was actually
4 used.

5 Q. Workforce czar?

6 A. Yeah. And what happened, and hear me out, I was
7 serving on the Delta Workforce Board, okay, for our
8 counties, funding federal money through and approving it
9 for workforce projects at community colleges and other
10 places, and -- and I started serving on this board, MCCB's
11 board, which was involved in workforce, and I could see
12 plainly that there were duplications in workforce funds,
13 duplications in services or whatever.

14 So when they started all that, I thought the
15 idea was they were just going to have someone track the
16 money and see if any duplications were being made and sort
17 of clean up the economics or workforce training for the
18 State.

19 After the bill was passed, Ryan Miller was hired
20 as the executive director of that entity, and they
21 determined to call it Accelerate. We look up after two or
22 three months and they start hiring people. So we're
23 asking, what are they doing? What's their involvement in
24 workforce? How is it going to affect us?

25 At any rate, I felt -- and this is my

1 perception, okay, I felt like Andrea took offense to the
2 existence of Accelerate and she got pretty verbal about
3 it. And I even had calls from several of the presidents
4 that, I guess, felt comfortable talking to me that
5 there -- you know, they felt like there was becoming to be
6 a problem.

7 Now, all of that was after she had already
8 served for some, I don't know, three or four years, I
9 thought successfully, you know. But as it turns out,
10 there were other issues that I wasn't aware of at the
11 time. But I do know that she was -- and I'm not -- I hate
12 to be here talking about her, but she was angry, to say
13 the least, you know, that -- that that was sort of like --
14 it's like a turfdom, I guess, infringing on her turf.
15 And, frankly, it made a lot of people uncomfortable.

16 I mean, I don't know if I should go on but I
17 actually contacted the Accelerate people and it turned out
18 one of them had originally been from Greenville. He
19 didn't work at Accelerate. He is the one that appointed
20 Ryan Miller as executive director. He was the president
21 of SWIB. That's Patrick Sullivan. And he actually called
22 me and he said, "Man, what is the deal with this lady? We
23 can't seem to sit down and have a conversation," blah,
24 blah, blah.

25 Long and short of it is, I said, "Well, why

1 A. Well, I know Dr. Mackey was involved in that.
2 Dexter -- wasn't it Dexter -- I think Dexter was involved
3 in that. Those two, I think, primarily, and I don't know
4 who worked under them, you know.

5 Q. Did you fault Mayfield for the diminution of the
6 workforce program at the college board?

7 A. No, I mean, I would -- I would say that she hurt
8 relations between our board and the folks, you know, at
9 that new entity, you know. I think -- I don't -- I hate
10 to say it, but I think -- yeah, I think she probably hurt
11 that, and, I mean, we were trying -- we were also at the
12 same time really trying to make amends on the back end,
13 trying to say, "Hey, you know, y'all need to figure out
14 what you're doing so we can get it resolved," and I don't
15 think it was resolved at all when she left.

16 Q. So is it your testimony that Mayfield had a
17 strained relationship with the people at Accelerate?

18 A. Yes, ma'am.

19 Q. And do you know if the same could be said of
20 Mackey and Dexter Holloway?

21 A. No, ma'am.

22 Q. You can't say that they had a strained
23 relationship with the folks over at Accelerate?

24 A. No, not at all. I don't think they did. I
25 don't think anybody else there did. I think -- I think --

1 well, you know, I'm speculating again, but Dr. Mayfield
2 had a lot of -- she had some issues going on. She had a
3 husband that was very sick and, you know, I didn't feel
4 like her health was real good either at the time, but, I
5 mean, to be honest with you, I think she managed to
6 alienate a lot of people both with Accelerate and with
7 MCCB.

8 We had -- the problem with it is we didn't
9 recognize it as a board, and the biggest -- the best
10 lesson we learned was we're relying on that director
11 coming in and giving us a report. I mean, in every board
12 that I serve on, I look at that now and -- executive
13 director, they come in, they give you a report, and you
14 take that report to be, you know, accurate, and so you
15 make your decisions based on that. And we learned a real
16 hard lesson.

17 But during COVID, we were doing a lot of
18 Zooming. We weren't in the office, you know. So it
19 just -- I don't know, it just -- I think it just really
20 escalated because of that, and we had people on our -- we
21 had people within our staff that were not happy, I guess,
22 is the best way to describe that.

23 Q. Not happy with Mayfield?

24 A. Well, you could say not happy with their job,
25 but, in all honesty, it was probably because of

1 leadership. Everything is about leadership. It got to
2 the point where we had -- we had people not coming -- you
3 know, people -- our board meetings -- we had staff that
4 always came to the board meetings and, all of a sudden,
5 they weren't coming to board meetings anymore. And I -- I
6 was the one asking, "Where are they at?" I asked where is
7 Dexter several, several months in a row. Never got an
8 answer. I didn't know that some job descriptions had
9 changed. We didn't know any of that.

10 I mean, you could also say that -- you know,
11 that the executive director answers to the board, but the
12 executive director can do whatever they want to with the
13 personnel without reporting to the board. And during that
14 period of time, we didn't know what was -- we just didn't
15 know what was going on.

16 And when we finally -- what we finally figured
17 out was something was wrong. We didn't really know what
18 at the time. Awkward situation to be in.

19 Q. And did you ever figure out exactly what was
20 wrong?

21 A. Honestly -- I'm not doctor, you know. I don't
22 want to sit here and say what I think happened. I don't
23 think it's -- I've probably already speculated, but things
24 we speculated about, I think, turned out to be true.

25 I think we had some illness going on there that

1 serving as executive director back in 2015 when he was a
2 finalist with Mayfield?

3 A. No, no, no. When Mayfield resigned, the Tuesday
4 or Wednesday after she resigned, I received a call from
5 Dr. Mackey.

6 Q. Also, when Mayfield -- you interviewed Mackey
7 and Mayfield when the position was open in 2015; correct?

8 MS. JOHNSON: Object to the form.

9 Q. (By Ms. Ross) I mean, I may not have it right.
10 You tell me if I'm right or wrong. Did you --

11 A. I was present for the final interviews in 2015,
12 Dr. Mackey and Dr. Mayfield, and I -- I do not remember
13 who the third person was.

14 Q. And you -- so that means that you have known
15 since at least 2015 that he had an interest in being the
16 executive director of the Mississippi Community College
17 Board?

18 A. I knew he had an interest in being it in 2015,
19 yes, but I also know that there were applications for -- I
20 know he -- he also had his -- the thought of wanting to be
21 a president of one of the community colleges as well.

22 Q. And to your knowledge, has the MCCB had
23 executive directors who served as college presidents
24 before they became the executive director of MCCB?

25 A. The only knowledge I have on that is

1 you --

2 A. No, ma'am.

3 Q. -- hand you a resignation letter?

4 A. No, ma'am.

5 Q. So after she left, what happened?

6 A. Oh, we were -- I don't really -- when you ask me
7 what happened, I really don't know that I can describe
8 what happened. I know we probably sat there and looked at
9 each other for a while, to be honest. And at some point,
10 the discussion was, okay, now what do we do, you know,
11 trying to figure out what do we do.

12 And I do know that, you know, my concern that --
13 concern of -- a lot was, again, the status of the staff,
14 you know, and the relationships we had with the
15 presidents, and the fact that we needed to, you know,
16 figure out what we were going to do next relative to, you
17 know, hiring an executive director.

18 Q. So who made the motion to appoint an interim?

19 A. You mean who -- who --

20 Q. Formally made the motion?

21 A. I don't remember.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. I mean, who said, "Hey, we need to hire somebody
24 now"; is that what you're asking?

25 Q. Appoint an interim director?

1 A. I don't really remember how we got to that, to
2 be honest, you know, at that point in time.

3 Q. Do the minutes reflect that?

4 A. No, ma'am.

5 Q. And was there any discussion on why that
6 person -- why any particular person should be named
7 interim executive director?

8 A. We are -- again, I will reiterate, we were
9 concerned about our staff and we were concerned about
10 relationships with the schools and the school presidents,
11 you know. We had -- we had -- I hate to say that -- say
12 it but it's like the whole system was in turmoil over what
13 had transpired with Dr. Mayfield, and then -- we probably
14 should have -- we probably should have done a better job
15 and seen it coming, quite honestly. We just didn't -- I
16 mean, we -- I guess we were dumb enough to think we could
17 get it resolved. We didn't.

18 But the conversation went to, we need to put
19 somebody in a leadership position quickly that we feel
20 like can smooth the waters, so to speak.

21 Q. And was that smooth the water with the staff and
22 the school presidents?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. And at the time that Kell was selected to smooth
25 the waters with the staff and the school presidents, had